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**Final Interagency Report  
of the Reagan Administration  
on the POW/MIA Issue  
in Southeast Asia**



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President Reagan, in his address to the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia on July 29, 1988, announced that he had directed a comprehensive study of the POW/MIA issue be prepared and provided to the families of our missing men, the Congress and the American people. The report that follows was prepared on an interagency basis in response to the President's directive.

### THE STRATEGY ADOPTED

The Reagan Administration inherited the POW/MIA issue at a time when no policy negotiations were underway with the governments of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR), no remains had been returned in over two years, and conclusions had been reached by a Presidential commission and a House Select Committee that no Americans could have survived the war and little accountability was possible.

President Reagan directed that the issue be made one of highest national priority, to overcome both the inertia of the past and to fulfill promises he made to the families of our missing men before assuming office that aggressive measures to resolve this issue were needed and would be undertaken.

It became evident early in President Reagan's first term that a conceptual approach was required which would energize the government to pursue the issue as a priority, signal to the Indochinese governments American determination to resolve the issue, ensure that our approach would complement, not conflict with United States foreign policy and national security goals, and build public support behind a national effort.

Policy positions and implementing actions were adopted, including: high-level public statements by the President and his Cabinet; the opening of serious policy-level negotiations with Vietnam and Laos; the development of a bipartisan approach to the issue; encouragement of a public awareness campaign, separating the issue as humanitarian in our negotiations; an upgrade of intelligence priorities; sustained diplomatic approaches to other governments; integration of the National League of Families into our efforts; and discouragement of private irresponsible activities. Each element of the strategy was mutually supportive and was fully implemented in late 1982.

President Reagan has delivered several major addresses on the issue as have the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs, the Administrators of Veterans Affairs, the Chairmen

of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Directors of the Defense Intelligence Agency and other officials in each department and agency.

An aggressive public awareness campaign, in coordination with the National League of POW/MIA Families (the League), raised domestic consciousness of this issue to the highest level since the end of the war, and media coverage increased dramatically.

Congressional support for the effort was initially centered in the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs and its POW/MIA Task Force. Congressional support since has grown substantially, and interest spans the entire political spectrum in both the House and the Senate.

Intelligence assets and priority devoted to the POW/MIA issue are at the highest level since the end of the war, and interagency intelligence coordination has improved substantially.

High-level negotiations with the Vietnamese and Lao governments were initiated in 1982 with highest priority directed at resolving the question of live prisoners. Negotiations have been frequent and sustained over the past six years, and following the August 1987 agreements reached by Presidential envoy, General John Vessey, unprecedented joint operations were initiated. The substance of negotiations has deepened, and more progress has resulted than at any time since the end of the war. Mutual agreement has been reached that should minimize attempts to link the POW/MIA issue to political differences. Other governments and international humanitarian organizations have urged cooperation from Vietnam.

The National League of POW/MIA Families, through its Board of Directors and its Executive Director, have become a fully functioning partner in our efforts to account for their relatives. League Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths is a vital member of the POW/MIA Interagency Group and has participated as a delegation member in all policy-level negotiations on the POW/MIA issue since 1982.

The Administration has made it clear through public statements, Congressional testimony, in negotiations and in other ways our opposition to irresponsible private activities which we have found operate on faulty or fabricated information and directly interfere with negotiations and serious pursuit of reliable intelligence information.

### THE ISSUE

2,383 Americans remain missing or unaccounted for as result of the conflict in Southeast Asia. A breakdown by country of loss follows:

Vietnam (North-656;South-1,091)	--	1,747
Laos	--	547
Cambodia	--	83
China	--	6
Total:		<u>2,383</u>

As categorized by their parent service following Operation Homecoming in 1973, 1,259 were listed in a POW/MIA status and 1,124 as killed in action/body not recovered. By the early 1980's, reviews of each loss incident by the parent services led to a presumptive finding of death in each case except one. That individual is listed as a prisoner of war in a symbolic gesture of the Reagan Administration commitment and directed by the Secretary of the Air Force. The presumptive findings of death, made for administrative and legal reasons, are not viewed as a substitute for serious pursuit of all avenues to determine the fate of those still missing.

### Northern Vietnam

In wartime North Vietnam, public security, militia and regular military units established a nationwide organization to investigate crashed aircraft, capture and process U.S. prisoners of war, bury remains and report incidents to central authorities. Most U.S. personnel were lost over or near populated areas, thereby making most crash sites readily accessible to immediate investigation by Vietnamese authorities. Vietnamese media releases during and after the war documented the extensive effort to implement this program.

### Southern Vietnam

South of the 17th parallel, there was a pervasive presence of U.S. and allied forces and, whenever possible, incidents of loss of U.S. personnel were exhaustively investigated, normally beginning immediately after the incident. During the war, Vietnamese forces had greater access to loss sites in territory they controlled and may have located lost aircraft which U.S. forces could not find. Based upon the system of collection of information on such incidents, depending upon battlefield conditions, it is logical to assume that Vietnamese forces would have collected some type of physical evidence or information (remains, dog tags, documents, personal effects) in a few hundred incidents. It should be noted that ground

conditions in the South were significantly different from those in the North, and records and information will necessarily be less complete. Fewer than 40 missing Americans remain on the died-in-captivity list furnished by the Provisional Revolutionary Government in the South. It is hoped that since 1975, the SRV has conducted some investigations of loss sites in the South to facilitate accountability on such cases.

#### Laos

In Laos, a minimum of 75 percent of U.S. personnel still unaccounted for were lost in areas under near-total control by Vietnamese forces. These losses were primarily in eastern Laos along the Vietnamese border and the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex. Nine Americans captured in Laos were transported to Vietnam and released, while a small number reportedly died enroute. Vietnamese forces in Laos were asked to report on the recovery of U.S. personnel, dead or alive, investigate such incidents thoroughly and forward to the central authorities physical evidence and reports. Given the battlefield conditions, it is likely that only a small number of U.S. remains could have been transported to Vietnam, but material evidence or reports would predictably have been sent on a significant number of the incidents, and such information could provide a cooperative basis for enhanced accountability.

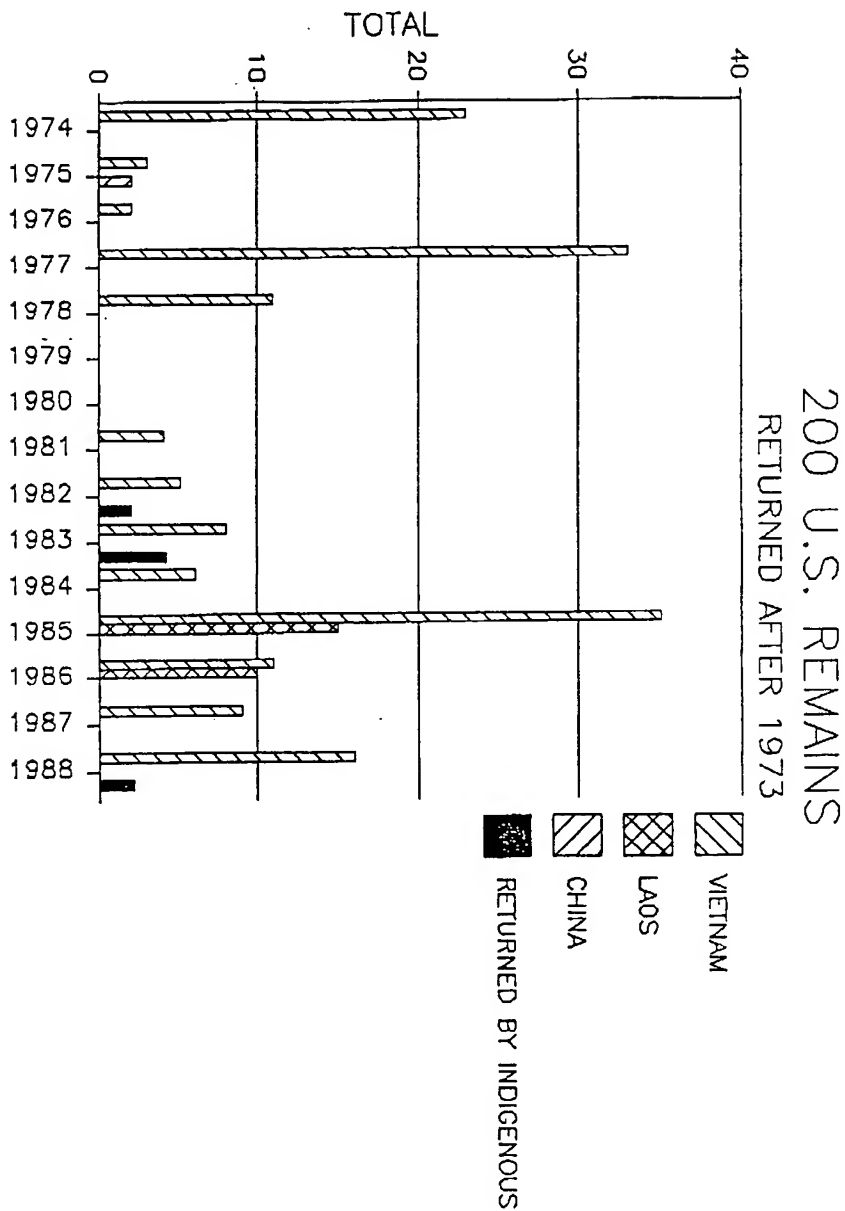
#### Cambodia

In eastern Cambodia, where most unaccounted for Americans were lost, Vietnamese forces' presence and control were similar to that in eastern Laos, and most U.S. casualties occurred in contact with Vietnamese forces. A few Americans may have died in Cambodia while under Vietnamese control. Vietnamese military records and reports should contain information on such individuals and these records may include information on Americans who died in contact with Vietnamese forces. It is highly doubtful that the current leadership in Phnom Penh can provide significant accountability unless information recovered by others was provided to them. A small number of American civilians who reportedly died at the hands of the Pol Pot regime may appear in records of that era.

#### The Political Environment

Resolving the status of missing Americans has varied depending upon the priority placed on the issue by the U.S. Government and the international political environment at the time. Figure 1 (see next page) illustrates the number of remains returned and identified as Americans by year and by country from which the remains were returned. The political

Figure 1



environment at the time as it affected cooperation on this issue is described below.

1976-1978: Following the end of the war, U.S.-Vietnamese negotiations were exploring the possibility of normalizing relations; this was subsequently scuttled by Vietnamese demands for war reparations and their invasion of Cambodia. U.S. policy at the time was that accounting for missing Americans was "a hoped for by-product" of the normalization process. Subsequent events demonstrated the danger of linking humanitarian cooperation with other issues, a linkage the Vietnamese, as a matter of policy, were then determined to achieve.

1978-1981: Following the breakdown of normalization talks, contact with Vietnamese officials virtually halted as did the return of remains and any other form of cooperation on the POW/MIA issue.

1981-1989: The Reagan Administration distinctly separated POW/MIA and other humanitarian issues from political issues such as aid, trade or the normalization of diplomatic relations. During this period, despite periodic unilateral halts in cooperation for political reasons, more remains and material evidence have been returned than at any time since the end of the war, policy and technical-level dialogue is frequent and substantive, joint investigative activities, surveys and crash site excavations have been initiated. In Laos, agreement has been reached to establish a year-round program of cooperation, and in Vietnam joint U.S.-Vietnamese teams are being deployed on a regular basis.

#### DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

To implement President Reagan's decision to make resolution of the POW/MIA issue a matter of the highest national priority, the United States Government (USG) over the past eight years has continually and consistently utilized all available diplomatic avenues to persuade the governments of Vietnam and Laos, as well as the current leadership in Phnom Penh, to cooperate fully on this humanitarian issue. In addition to emphasizing the humanitarian nature of the problem, we have stressed that it is in our mutual interest to resolve the POW/MIA issue in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Progress has been painfully slow, punctuated by periods of cooperation and then halts, primarily due to attempts by the Vietnamese and Cambodians to link the issue to political differences. Our steadfast policy of divorcing this and other

humanitarian issues from political questions, however, has produced concrete results. Despite periodic disappointments, the level of activity and cooperation has increased over time. Unprecedented patterns of cooperation have been achieved, as both the Vietnamese and the Lao now appear committed to working with us to resolve the issue through accelerated joint operations.

The history of diplomatic efforts during the Reagan Administration is one of constant pressure on the parties concerned to accept their obligations to address this humanitarian issue constructively and thoroughly while being flexible on the modalities. This has been accompanied by concrete offers to provide financial reimbursement and logistical support to investigative, survey and recovery operations.

In the past eight years, senior Administration officials have met with SRV officials almost twenty times seeking to establish the necessary level of cooperation on the POW/MIA issue and other urgent humanitarian concerns. In addition, technical-level meetings were held twenty-two times and six joint field operations have been conducted. For the first five years, progress followed a "two steps forward, one step back" pattern as the Vietnamese repeatedly promised more cooperation than they were willing or able to deliver. Despite verbal agreement to separate humanitarian issues from political ones, the Vietnamese tied pledges to political questions on several occasions. Whether this pattern was due to internal political differences or a calculated strategy to exploit the issue in the mistaken belief that U.S. concessions on political questions would be possible, the result was the same -- raised hopes of the families and the American people were dashed and Vietnam's image in the United States suffered.

Each step forward, however, contributed to our goals of seeking the return of anyone who may still be held captive, obtaining the fullest possible accounting for those still missing and repatriating the remains of those who died serving our nation. Each policy or technical meeting was important in its own right, but the meetings described below were key in furthering our progress.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage held talks in Hanoi in February 1982 which resulted in SRV agreement to hold four technical meetings a year between the U.S. Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) and the SRV Office for Seeking Missing Persons.



In October 1983, NSC Director of Asian Affairs Richard Childress and National League of POW/MIA Families Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths met for several hours in New York in an unannounced meeting with SRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. In this and a follow-up meeting with Griffiths, the depth of U.S. feeling on this issue was explained in detail, agreement in principle was reached on pursuit of discrepancy cases as highest initial priority, and agreement in principle was reached on a high-level delegation to travel to Hanoi to make practical arrangements to carry out an operational program. (Discrepancy cases refer to Americans about whom there was strong evidence of survival and capture, or who otherwise came under Vietnamese control, or about whom the Vietnamese authorities should have specific information.)

Following the meeting, in February 1984, Mr. Armitage led a delegation of White House, League, State and Defense officials to Hanoi and reached agreement with Foreign Minister Thach to accelerate cooperation and de-link the POW/MIA issue from U.S./Vietnamese relations in other areas. Hanoi also agreed to focus initial efforts on the "most accessible cases" in the Hanoi/Haiphong area and those listed as having died in captivity in southern Vietnam.

Following a March 1985 policy-level delegation to Hanoi, in August 1985, Mr. Childress led another delegation to Vietnam to discuss their announced intention to resolve the POW/MIA issue within two years. Prior to the delegation's arrival, the U.S. presented a proposed joint plan to accomplish that objective which would have concluded with nationwide joint investigations of live sighting reports, surveys and excavations. The U.S. plan also provided an extensive list of U.S. supportive actions. Vietnamese officials did not react to the joint plan, but provided a unilateral plan and requested U.S. reaction. A follow-up delegation was led by Mr. Childress to New York in September 1985 at which time the U.S. provided comments on Vietnam's two-year work plan. The SRV agreed for the first time to a joint crash site excavation which took place in November 1985. Following this series of meetings, the largest repatriation of remains subsequently identified as American took place in 1985-86.

Vietnam began making public statements in 1986 that the U.S. was not fulfilling its commitments to the Vietnamese plan. In July 1986, Mr. Childress led an interagency delegation to Hanoi to meet with Foreign Minister Thach to formalize U.S. commitments to support Vietnam's unilateral two-year plan, but rejected any political linkage. The meeting resulted in agreements that technical talks would be held in August and October, at least six such meetings would be held

per year, U.S. and SRV forensic specialists would consult in Vietnam, and the SRV would provide the U.S. with written results of its investigations into reports of live prisoner sightings. Moreover, the SRV agreed to permit U.S. experts to accompany its officials on investigations in accessible areas, discuss specific crash sites for excavation, and accept an invitation to pay a second visit (the first occurred in 1982) to the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI) and Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) facilities in Hawaii.

These pledges and promises of cooperation notwithstanding, rapid progress remained elusive through 1986. Despite our best efforts to convince Hanoi to come to grips with the POW/MIA question and public U.S. acknowledgement of progress thus far, Vietnamese actions made it clear that progress was linked to political issues, irrespective of their continued occupation of Cambodia. The United States steadfastly maintained its position that normalization of relations with Vietnam could only take place in the context of an acceptable settlement in Cambodia which included a complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and that humanitarian issues should be addressed regardless of political differences between our two countries.

In an effort to increase momentum in resolving this pressing humanitarian issue, President Reagan approved a recommendation in October 1986 to appoint a special Presidential emissary and in February 1987, the President named former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John W. Vessey, Jr. (Ret.), as Special Presidential Emissary to Hanoi on the POW/MIA issue. Following difficult negotiations to establish an agreed upon agenda, General Vessey visited Hanoi in August 1987.

This initiative, along with President Reagan's approval of several new cooperative gestures for material support to joint operations and a decision to agree to facilitate Vietnamese humanitarian concerns, led to a gradual increase in POW/MIA cooperation during the past 18 months. The increased pace of cooperation also reflected Hanoi's apparent desire to pre-position itself for the changed environment which would evolve when and if it withdrew from Cambodia in the context of a political settlement.

During General Vessey's meetings with Foreign Minister Thach in Hanoi, he obtained agreement to resume cooperation on POW/MIA and other humanitarian issues of mutual concern, including the Amerasian and Orderly Departure Programs, and to further discussion of a resettlement program for former reeducation center detainees and their family members who wish to come to the United States. (Thus far, we have not reached agreement

with the Vietnamese on such a resettlement program, but cooperation during the past 18 months on the Amerasian and Orderly Departure Programs has been excellent.) The two sides reaffirmed the need to focus first on discrepancy cases and on Americans listed as having died in captivity in the South. General Vessey provided representative case files for Vietnamese consideration. He also indicated that the U.S. could not consider direct aid to Vietnam absent a Cambodian settlement, but would address certain humanitarian concerns of the Vietnamese people, specifically by encouraging American non-governmental organizations (NGO) to provide prosthetics assistance to Vietnam's disabled. This was later expanded to encompass child survival assistance. In all, seven teams of U.S. medical experts have visited Vietnam to discuss and evaluate its humanitarian concerns.

Drawing on information gathered during these trips, the State Department has published and distributed to the American NGO community separate reports on Vietnam's needs in the areas of prosthetics and child disabilities. We have sought to generate interest in helping Vietnam by contacting major health supply corporations and scores of NGO's which had not been active in Vietnam. These efforts have already resulted in a substantial flow of prosthetic-related supplies to Vietnam. Moreover, numerous NGO's are actively exploring how their talents and resources might best be utilized to help alleviate the massive health problems Vietnam faces.

Since the August 1987 meeting, General Vessey has maintained a regular dialogue with Foreign Minister Thach and has led three official delegations to meet with senior Vietnamese officials in New York (September 1987, June and October 1988). In addition, U.S. and Vietnamese technical experts have met in Hanoi eight times since August 1987 to exchange information on specific PCW/MIA incidents of loss.

Since General Vessey's August 1987 visit, the Vietnamese turned over 140 remains, including those unilaterally recovered, for U.S. examination. To date, identifications have been made by CILHI for 27 of these cases and the latest repatriation of 38 remains appears to offer substantial identification of a majority as Americans. Analysis continues in an attempt to make individual identifications on the remainder, but we anticipate that most will prove to be of indigenous origin or unidentifiable. Recently, Hanoi agreed to our long-standing request for joint anthropological examinations of recovered remains, some of which were found by the U.S. and SRV technical experts to warrant further examination at CILHI. A repatriation of these remains is also scheduled for this month.

Perhaps most indicative of Hanoi's new sense of commitment, in July 1988 Vietnam agreed to joint U.S. - Vietnamese field investigations, aimed in the first instance at resolving specific discrepancy cases. The first two teams conducted their ten-day joint operations in areas north of Hanoi in late September and early October. Two U.S. teams returned to Vietnam in late October for similar activities in the area west of Hanoi. Between December 5 and 15, three joint teams investigated cases in the areas of Vinh and Dong Hoi, to the south of Hanoi.

- Another round of joint field operations is underway, now expanded to five teams. These operations have provided new and helpful information to determine the fate of those still missing, and greater sharing of the wartime records will facilitate resolution of many cases. Discussions also continue with the objective of increasing comparison of U.S. and Vietnamese POW/MIA information.

President Reagan's commitment to the POW/MIA issue has also produced positive results in dealing with the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). Since 1982, United States representatives held meetings or conducted joint activities with LPDR officials on 31 occasions in Vientiane, Washington, Honolulu and New York. Included have been four joint excavations of crash sites of U.S. aircraft downed during the Vietnam war period. The most important diplomatic initiatives and meetings are described below.

Following a response to a disaster relief situation in Vietnam and the cooperative reception of a League delegation in Laos, the President, in January 1983, stated the U.S. was fully prepared to take added concrete steps with Laos to improve bilateral relations and reiterated that progress on the POW/MIA issue would be the principal measure of Lao sincerity. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Daniel O'Donohue met with Lao Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh Srithirath in New York that same month and in February, for the first time since the end of the war, a U.S. POW/MIA technical team visited Laos.

Limited progress was made during the next two years. In December 1983, a U.S. POW/MIA technical team surveyed an American crash site in southern Laos and proposed a joint excavation. The following July, Laos agreed in principle to a U.S./Lao excavation of an AC-130 crash site, and both sides made preparations for an excavation during the next dry season. Unfortunately, an illegal cross-border foray by private Americans, coupled with false statements of official support, caused the Lao government to delay the excavation for nearly one year. It was finally conducted in February 1985,

accounting for thirteen Air Force crew members. The excavation was the first in Southeast Asia since the end of the war and marked by unprecedented joint cooperation.

In July 1985, Vice President Bush, in an address to the National League of POW/MIA Families, announced Lao agreement to a second crash site excavation. After a subsequent series of meetings, U.S. and Lao personnel jointly surveyed a 1972 U.S. C-130 crash site during the dry season in January 1986. The excavation took place in February, and nine individuals from this site have thus far been identified.

Despite reaffirmation of prior agreements in October 1986 talks between Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Monjo and Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh, progress remained elusive for the next ten months, a period when the Vietnamese had also halted cooperation.

In August 1987, Mr. Childress led a U.S. delegation, including League and State Department representatives, to Vientiane for meetings with Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut and Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh. The Lao agreed to renew POW/MIA cooperation. That October, at U.S. invitation, Vice Minister Soubanh visited Washington D.C. for meetings with senior State Department, NSC, and League officials. The next month, during talks in Vientiane to implement the agreements reached during the August visit, the Lao agreed to excavate unilaterally a crash site in southern Laos. They also pledged to investigate discrepancy cases and provide the information to U.S. officials. The results of these investigations have not yet been provided.

In January 1988, Laos announced a third joint excavation would be conducted and the following month, Laos turned over remains reported to be those of two Americans, the first such unilateral action since 1978. In May, U.S. and Lao officials surveyed and conducted the third joint excavation of a U.S. aircraft crash site; on-site cooperation was outstanding, but no remains were recovered.

In June 1988, during his meetings in Washington D.C. with Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur, other senior U.S. Government officials, the League Executive Director and members of Congress, Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh indicated that additional surveys and excavations would be conducted in the fall. Vice Foreign Minister Soubanh subsequently visited the CIL and JCRC facilities in Hawaii to gain greater familiarity with the technical process of accounting for POW/MIAs.

After bilateral meetings in Vientiane and New York in August and September, a joint U.S. and Lao team surveyed three crash sites in eastern Laos as a prelude to joint excavations. A team of Lao officials visited the JCRC and CIL facilities in Hawaii, also in September, for more detailed information about the operation of these two agencies.

An agreement was reached in November to conduct the fourth U.S./Lao joint excavation. A team of U.S. and Lao technical personnel excavated a crash site of a single-seat aircraft in southern Laos in December and conducted additional surveys upon completion of the excavation, where remains were recovered.

In early January 1989, Mr. Childress led an interagency delegation of State, Defense, Commerce and League officials to Vientiane. Substantial progress was made, to include agreement for two excavations and additional surveys and, for the first time, the Lao government agreed to establish a year-round joint operational program with details to be worked out at a POW/MIA consultative meeting late this month. As we continue joint cooperation with the Lao, the goal is the implementation of a substantive year-round schedule of POW/MIA joint research, investigation, survey and excavation activities.

### Cambodia

The United States, like most countries in the world, does not recognize the Heng Samrin regime, i.e., the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which the Vietnamese installed in Phnom Penh in the wake of their December 1978 invasion of Cambodia. Officials in Phnom Penh have refused to treat the POW/MIA issue as a purely humanitarian concern, but rather have attempted to use it as a vehicle for direct dialogue with the U.S., to gain exclusive recognition as the legitimate government of the Cambodian people.

As in Laos, most of the 83 Americans listed as unaccounted for in Cambodia were lost in areas controlled by Vietnamese forces. In addition, the massive dislocation and chaos caused by the 1975 - 1978 reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge and the subsequent Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia have severely complicated the task of resolving these cases.

In January 1984, the leadership in Phnom Penh joined the SRV and LPDR in issuing an Indochina Foreign Ministers Communiqué indicating willingness to cooperate with the United States on the POW/MIA issue. Between February 1984 and July-1986, the United States has repeatedly asked the Vietnamese to use their influence with the PRK regime to resolve the issue of

Americans unaccounted for in Cambodia. Similar appeals for assistance were made to Lao officials. Both the Vietnamese and the Lao made commitments to urge cooperation, but nothing has yet resulted from these efforts. In addition, the PRK authorities have failed to respond in a substantive manner to letters sent by the League Executive Director asking for information about Americans missing in Cambodia.

In September 1987, after receiving from the League Executive Director case files on all Americans missing in Cambodia, PRK Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hun Sen publicly stated that his government had "quite a number" of remains of Americans. The United States responded by asking an international organization represented in Phnom Penh to pursue this matter directly with the PRK regime. To date, despite subsequent public claims by PRK officials that they have "more than 80" remains of Americans, they have not responded to these humanitarian appeals. Although it is doubtful that they possess the number of identifiable U.S. remains claimed, and despite our political differences, the U.S. has publicly and privately made it clear that we are prepared to send an official repatriation team to Phnom Penh to retrieve the remains they claim to hold.

#### INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS

In addition to negotiations with the governments concerned to obtain answers on the fate of those still unaccounted for, early in the first term the Reagan Administration directed that all-source intelligence priorities on the POW/MIA issue be raised. The entire intelligence community now affords top priority to collecting and analyzing information which could lead to accounting for missing Americans and provides support for U.S. negotiators.

During U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, the intelligence community collected and analyzed a voluminous amount of all-source intelligence dealing with U.S. POWs and MIAs. Several million captured documents were translated and screened for information about missing Americans. Over one quarter of a million prisoners and defectors from Communist forces were questioned concerning their knowledge of missing U.S. personnel. American, Vietnamese, and other allied prisoners were debriefed, upon their release or escape, for information on U.S. POWs. The national technical systems also provided information directly related to the POW/MIA issue. Defectors from Vietnam's security services, military and diplomatic corps have been debriefed for their knowledge of U.S. prisoners.

U.S. collection activities were significantly reduced following the U.S. withdrawal, but the wartime information was available as a base of data on which to reinvigorate the national effort in 1981.

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) is the focal point for our nation's intelligence efforts in this area. Raised priorities during the Reagan Administration permitted the creation of new collection initiatives within DIA and refocused efforts by the entire intelligence community. DIA's Special Office for POW/MIA was increased in authorized strength from 12 personnel in 1981 to 39 today, supplemented by a special team deployed in Southeast Asia to accelerate collection of refugee information on priority cases in support of building the U.S. data base. Along with the personnel increases, the POW/MIA special office was concurrently elevated directly under the DIA headquarters element. The efforts are also supplemented by the Department of State and the Defense Attache system which keep foreign governments abreast of our interest. The international diplomatic community continues to be a valuable source of information.

The Joint Casualty Resolution Center (JCRC) and U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory (CILHI)

The JCRC, a joint service organization which functions under the operational control of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, was upgraded as well, along with an intensified refugee debriefing program. In 1981, the JCRC was manned by 12 personnel, including a three-man liaison office located in Bangkok, Thailand. Currently, JCRC strength is 27 personnel with a temporary duty surge capacity depending on the pace of requirements. The liaison office in Bangkok was doubled in strength from three to six personnel, plus enhanced logistics support. In October 1988, the JCRC was augmented by seven military personnel on temporary duty to meet the increased mission requirements brought about by the commencement of joint investigations of POW/MIA cases in Vietnam and the increased tempo of POW/MIA activities in Laos. Assuming continued joint cooperation, the JCRC has plans for additional strength increases on a permanent basis to meet welcome demands.

Reflecting the renewed priority and activity, full-time manning at the CILHI has increased from 26 personnel in 1981 to 40 today. An upgrade in specialties was also implemented to include a forensic dentist and six physical anthropologists.



JCRC/CIL teams are responsible for conducting on-site surveys/excavations and identification activities, and they have investigated 14 incidents under the new agreements in Vietnam for joint investigations, recovered remains which are undergoing analysis and gained additional information on several other incidents.

The joint field teams in Vietnam are producing additional information to supplement that initially held by the U.S. It is anticipated that such information, along with the provision of wartime records from the Vietnamese, can provide significant information on many cases. Joint surveys/excavations in Laos have been conducted by JCRC/CIL personnel as well, and have been particularly productive.

JCRC/CIL Personnel also held technical meetings with Vietnamese and Lao officials. A total of 22 such meetings have been held with the Vietnamese since 1981, and eight of these since General Vessey's mission in August 1987. The nature of the meetings has changed over the past several years reflecting the increased seriousness with which the governments concerned have treated the issue. Greater two-way exchange of information has been possible, and increased understanding at the technical level has been established. A more open sharing of official information is needed and the current focus of policy discussions is to make our technical exchange even more effective.

The Government of Laos conducts POW/MIA discussions through our respective Embassies in Vientiane and Washington, supplemented by joint field operations. Since August, 1987, the pace of activity has necessitated POW/MIA consultative meetings with JCRC/CIL specialists under the auspices of our Embassy in Vientiane. Two such meetings have been held (1987, 1988), and the next meeting is scheduled for late January 1989 to structure a year-round workplan.

#### THE PUBLIC DIMENSION

Public awareness, as an integral part of policy, played an important role in emphasizing the determination of the United States to resolve the POW/MIA issue. The awareness program adopted by the Administration also served to sensitize the American people to the need for support of revitalized official efforts.

In conjunction with the National League of POW/MIA Families, numerous steps were taken to better inform the public. Initially, factual information was distributed which

revealed the extent to which the Vietnamese Government had failed to cooperate in the past to provide the fullest possible accounting for missing Americans. Increased awareness of the facts of the issue, it was believed, would generate support for a unified message from the American people that cooperation in resolving the issue was in the national interest of the Indochinese countries and would improve the atmosphere between our peoples.

From its inception in 1982, the public awareness campaign steadily gained momentum. The President and senior members of the Administration achieved initial media interest--which in turn affected the attitudes of the American people and the behavior of the governments in Indochina. Specific programs were developed to ensure that the POW/MIA families, the Congress, the media, the active-duty military, veterans groups and the general public were informed of current official efforts, and active, responsible participation was encouraged. The original purpose was achieved, and there is no longer any question in Hanoi, in Vientiane or in Phnom Penh, of the seriousness of the U.S. Government and the American people in seeking resolution of the POW/MIA issue.

The Department of Defense, executive agent for the Administration, renewed substantive communication with the POW/MIA families with personal contact through service casualty offices and publication of a special next-of-kin newsletter to provide current information regarding official efforts. A comprehensive policy of "full disclosure" was established to ensure that the family members were apprised of the latest information which pertains or may pertain to their missing relatives. Policy and technical officials regularly addressed national and regional meetings of the POW/MIA Families, to provide current information and respond to questions. Regaining the confidence of the families was fundamental to ensuring public support for the government's efforts, and President Reagan sent a personal holiday message to each of the primary next of kin reassuring them of his renewed commitment for the next year.

Each year the Congress has passed a joint resolution establishing a National POW/MIA Recognition Day on a bipartisan basis. In support of the President's Proclamation, the League, supported by veterans groups, sought and obtained the active involvement of state and local governments in adopting similar resolutions. In 1988, 46 of the 50 states established POW/MIA Recognition Day in conjunction with efforts at the national level.

The dedication of national veterans organizations to the issue and in support of the families through earlier difficult years formed a powerful, national alliance in the private sector. Veterans, like the POW/MIA families, recognized the general public aversion to Vietnam-associated subjects and the need for resolving the POW/MIA issue on realistic and factual terms. Administration officials focused seriously on informing the veterans community of our strategy and the need for its support to gain the attention of the leaders in Southeast Asia. Policy resolutions adopted by these organizations, representing over 8,400,000 former servicemen and women, have been uniformly supportive. Their support augmented official efforts through private sector activities, initiated by or coordinated with the League to include public petitions to Hanoi urging humanitarian cooperation.

Consensus was difficult in earlier years when the priority was raised. A few veterans sought to serve as intermediaries between the Administration and the Vietnamese government which initially misled Vietnam to believe that an alternative channel to government-to-government cooperation was available. Some veterans sought to organize private rescue operations as well. Increased public awareness of the issue also brought forth groups and individuals who sought to capitalize on the issue for personal or financial gain. Countering these small but vocal minorities required significant education, effort and resources. Their distribution of misinformation led to charges of conspiracy and cover-up against the government, and private fundraising on the POW/MIA issue with false or distorted material came under Congressional scrutiny. Congressional and Executive Branch investigations were conducted which clearly concluded there was no basis for the charges, thus reassuring public opinion of the U.S. Government's seriousness and commitment. Although this phenomena reached its height from 1984 to 1986, and deflated unfulfilled promises of this minority, sporadic episodes still occur, but against a background of accelerated progress which is accepted and supported by the American people.

Increased public visibility also affected Congress, through constituent inquiries and calls for hearings and investigations. It also resulted in introduction of legislation calling for a national commission to resolve the POW/MIA issue through conclusions based solely on U.S.-held information. The House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs held frequent open hearings on the POW/MIA issue, and classified briefings were also routinely given to this committee and its Task Force on American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, as well as the Select Committee on Intelligence. Individual Congressional initiatives, heightened

by increased public interest, occasionally resulted in mixed signals; however, the Congress, working through their responsible committees, consolidated their bipartisan support by unanimously passing helpful resolutions which backed the President's policies and rejected those factually flawed or clearly political in motive.

Throughout the difficult controversies which arose, the League relied on the Congress to resolve major controversies and called upon all involved to deal in facts. The families were frustrated with the pace of results, but the vast majority expressed strong support for ongoing efforts and continue to reject simplistic solutions.

Due to the current level of cooperation between the U.S. and the governments of Vietnam and Laos, an even greater sense of unified support is evident, but greater factual understanding of the POW/MIA issue is needed. The current task is to channel already raised public awareness in the most productive manner. Continued distribution of factual data will reduce the likelihood that supportive Americans can be victimized by those seeking to capitalize on the priority and visibility of the issue.

The level of public knowledge, combined with the increased cooperation, should minimize any attempt by Vietnam to further manipulate the issue for political advantage. Should such exploitation be attempted again, the American people would seriously question the efficacy of the government to government process, and Vietnam's public image would suffer further.

#### THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The size and nature of the war in Southeast Asia, enhanced U.S. rescue capabilities and improved identification techniques have all reduced the absolute number of Americans missing or unaccounted for in Southeast Asia as compared to other wars. For example, over 78,000 remain unaccounted for from WW II where the U.S. had full access to the battlefields.

Actual reduction of the numerical figure from each American war has been dependent upon the return of an individual alive, forensic identification of remains or recovery circumstances that make identity clear. However, the objective of obtaining the fullest possible accounting extends to obtaining all possible information concerning the fate of an individual as well. In those circumstances where recovery, alive or dead, is not possible, individual accountability will rest upon information available to the U.S. Government, that forwarded by

the Indochinese governments, information obtained through joint investigations, or a combination thereof. Each case requires individual scrutiny.

For example, in those cases where U.S. eyewitness accounts detail aircraft losses over the water, making clear that the manner of death would preclude remains recovery, or where extensive wartime search and recovery operations were unsuccessful, accountability could rest entirely on U.S. reports.

In those cases where initial incident information indicates evidence of capture, a reasonable likelihood of remains recovery or knowledge by the Indochinese governments, the fullest possible accounting must be based on subsequent intelligence information, information from the Indochinese governments or actual recovery operations.

In those cases where no substantive information is available, i.e., disappeared "without a trace," cooperative efforts became paramount.

A clear distinction exists between remains recovery and identification, and accountability. USG efforts and priority must be directed to the return of as many USG personnel as possible, both alive and dead, and also to provide as definitive individual answers as possible to the families concerned in the form of information from whatever source, along with an official evaluation of credibility.

In some cases, initial incident information and subsequent collection efforts provide a reasonable picture of a man's fate and recovery prospects. This narrative, provided to the Indochinese governments, is a critical reference point in rendering judgements on subsequent information provided by those governments short of the actual return of remains. Accounts from Indochinese records would hopefully include verifiable eyewitness reports, photographic or other information to add confidence to any narrative provided. If such information is consistent with reliable USG-held information, it would buttress the case. Thus, the overall record of effort of the Indochinese governments must be taken into consideration when reaching a conclusion as to whether a credible accounting has been achieved.

It is obvious from a review of statistical data on the 2,383 men listed as missing or unaccounted for that many unfortunately will never be recovered. U.S. records indicate that over 400 individuals were lost over water. Another 450 individual loss locations are unknown, including both air and